



What Levels of Proficiency Do Immersion Students Achieve?

Report by

Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS), University of Oregon

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5290 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 • 541-346-5699

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Question:

How do the proficiency outcomes of students in immersion programs compare to those of students in traditional language programs?

Answer:

Virtually all students who are enrolled early in immersion programs succeed in reaching the ACTFL Intermediate levels of proficiency by the end of high school. At these levels, students are able to successfully handle everyday communicative tasks in the target language. Many immersion students, in fact, reach Advanced levels of proficiency by grade 12, especially for interpersonal communications skills. In traditional four-year high school language programs, less than half the students completing the program have reached these levels of proficiency.

Research Summary:

For most students in U.S. high schools, proficiency in a second language must be acquired at school, as there is little opportunity to acquire it naturalistically outside of class. In traditional high school programs, the majority of students are still at benchmark level 3 or below by end of their fourth year of study. These levels are similar to the ACTFL levels Novice-Low through Novice-High.

In contrast, virtually all students enrolled in a language immersion program throughout their elementary and high school years are performing in the ACTFL Intermediate range by grade 12. Many appear to be at ACTFL Advanced levels, although the assessment used for this study does not test the Advanced level. The difference between the two groups is particularly notable for speaking skills. Less than a third of students in traditional programs can perform at the Intermediate level by grade 12.

Our study used a database of students enrolled in immersion language programs nationwide to develop a profile of typical immersion program learning outcomes. In all, we looked at results from 1,477 students who were studying Spanish, French, Japanese, or Chinese in 14 states across the U.S. We had reading scores for 1,425 students, writing scores for 1,397, and speaking scores for 1,326 students. (Listening results were not available.) All students in this study began their immersion program before grade 3 and were currently enrolled in an immersion program. Data from different types of programs, such as one-way, two-way, full-, and half-day programs are combined. These latter factors will critically impact individual student performance and the overall success of an immersion program. However, the goal of this study is to contrast the outcomes for immersion programs, in general, with traditional four-year high school programs.

The tables below show the percentage of students in immersion programs at proficiency levels 4 or higher for selected grades. (Levels are based to the CASLS Benchmark Scale; the ACTFL Intermediate range is approximately levels 4 through 6.) For comparison, equivalent percentages for students in the fourth year of regular high school programs are also included. The results are shown separately for each of the three skills tested: reading, writing, and speaking.

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Table 1. Students' Foreign Language Proficiency by Program, Grade, and Skill

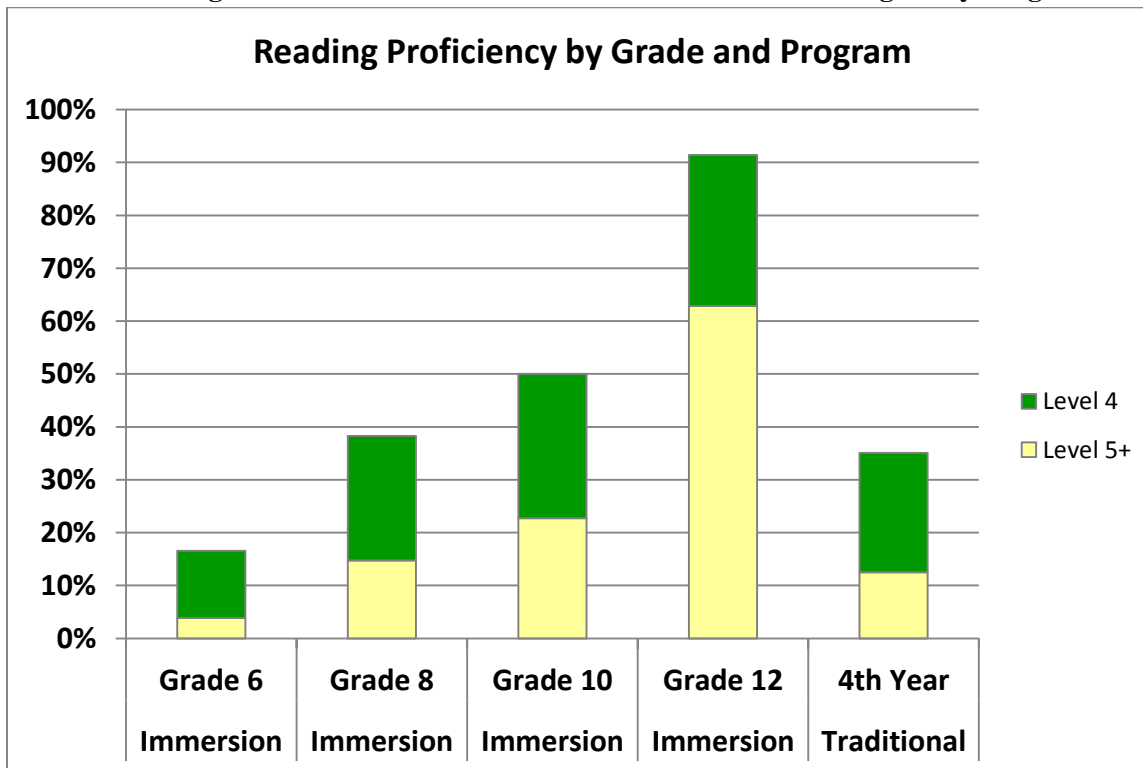
| Reading | Immersion Grade 6 | Immersion Grade 8 | Immersion Grade 10 | Immersion Grade 12 | Traditional 4th Year |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Level 4 | 13% | 24% | 27% | 29% | 23% |
| Level 5 or higher | 4% | 15% | 23% | 63% | 13% |
| Total | 17% | 38% | 50% | 91% | 35% |

| Writing | Immersion Grade 6 | Immersion Grade 8 | Immersion Grade 10 | Immersion Grade 12 | Traditional 4th Year |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Level 4 | 55% | 43% | 42% | 44% | 43% |
| Level 5 or higher | 2% | 24% | 38% | 50% | 13% |
| Total | 56% | 67% | 80% | 94% | 56% |

| Speaking | Immersion Grade 6 | Immersion Grade 8 | Immersion Grade 10 | Immersion Grade 12 | Traditional 4th Year |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Level 4 | 41% | 43% | 55% | 47% | 24% |
| Level 5 or higher | 0% | 16% | 25% | 50% | 4% |
| Total | 41% | 59% | 79% | 97% | 28% |

Charts 1 to 3 illustrate the results shown in the tables above.

Chart 1. Reading - Percent of Students at Benchmark Levels 4 and Higher by Program and Grade



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Chart 2. Writing - Percent of Students at Benchmark Levels 4 and Higher by Program and Grade

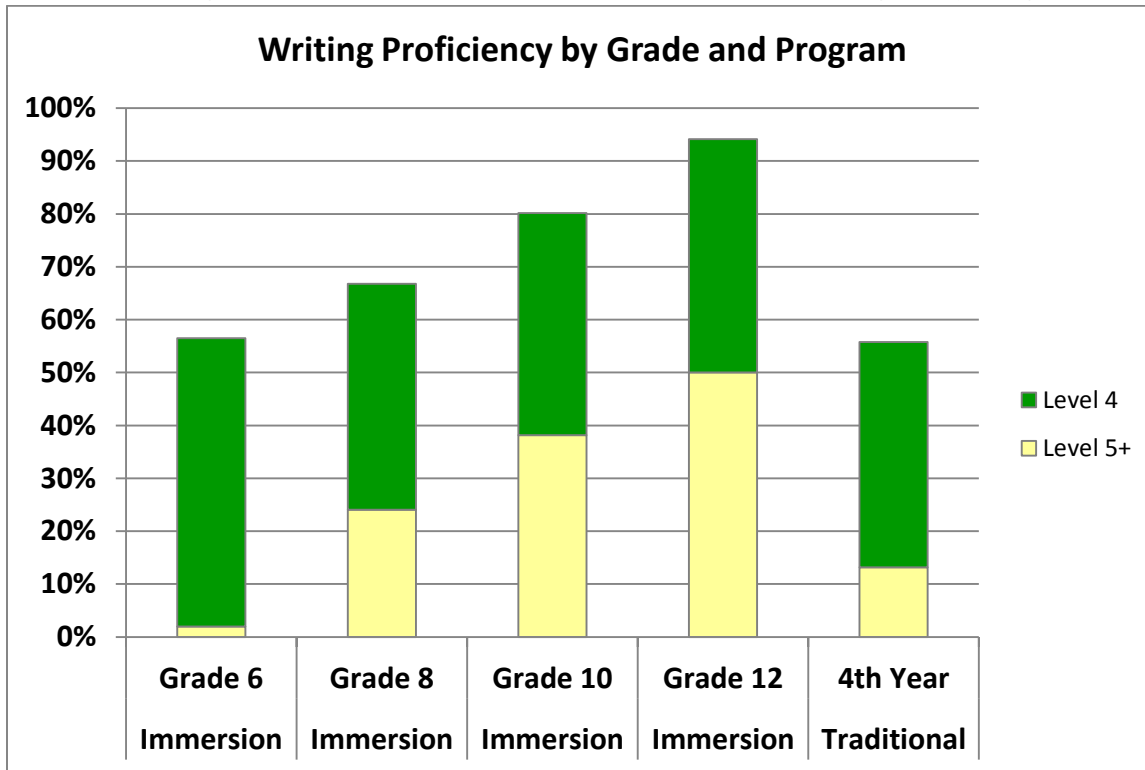
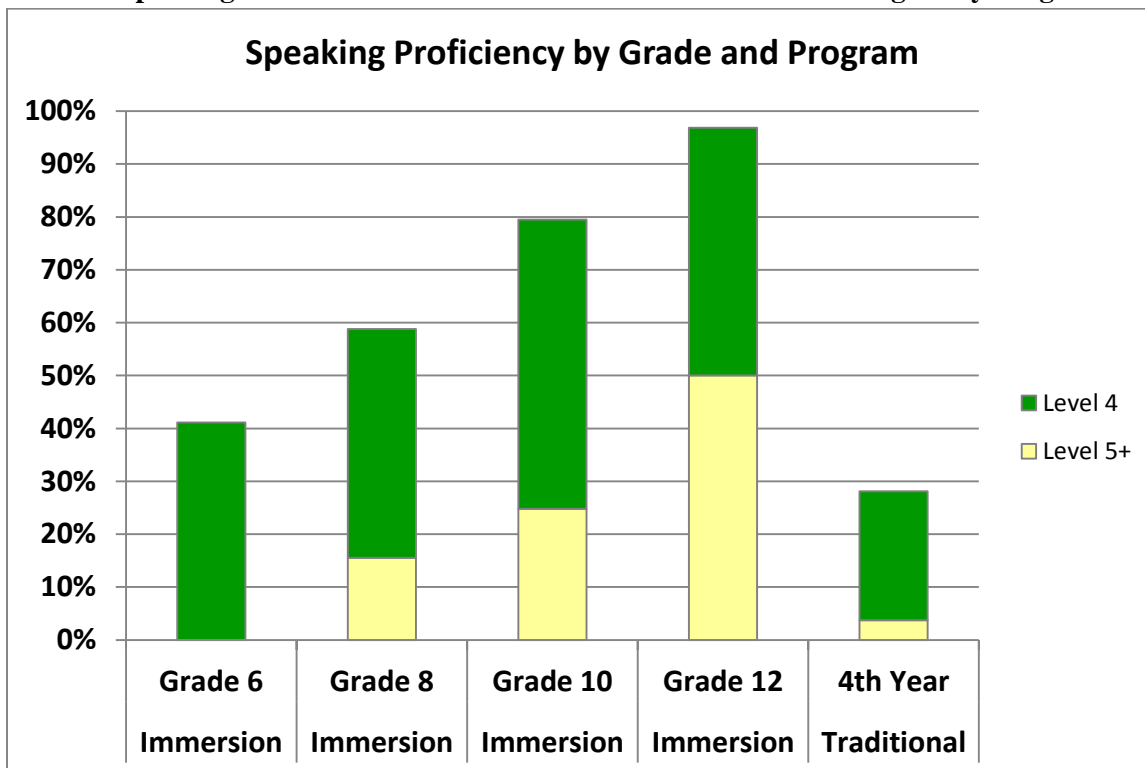


Chart 3. Speaking - Percent of Students at Benchmark Levels 4 and Higher by Program and Grade



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Data Analysis:

Proficiency testing was conducted using the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) developed by CASLS and administered by Avant Assessment. All components of the test and were delivered to students via the Internet. Teachers proctored their students in school computer labs. These results are based on the data collected during the 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10 school years.

The data are limited to students who had studied a foreign language in an immersion program since grade 3 or earlier. Students who spoke the language of study at home were not included. Based on these criteria, a total of 1,477 students of Chinese, French, Japanese, and Spanish are included in the analysis. Students were tested in any or all language skills (reading, speaking, and writing), depending on the needs of their schools. In all, a total of 1,425 students were assessed in reading, 1,397 in writing, and 1,326 in speaking.

The reading test component consisted of a series of multiple-choice items delivered using a computer-adaptive algorithm. At the end of the reading test, students provided writing and speaking samples in response to a standard set of prompts. These were scored using trained human raters. Students' reading, writing, and speaking scores were reported separately as CASLS Benchmark Levels. Benchmark levels are based on the ACTFL Guidelines: Benchmark levels 1 to 3 correspond approximately to Novice-Low, Novice-Mid and Novice-High; benchmark levels 4 to 6 correspond approximately to Intermediate-Low, Intermediate-Mid and Intermediate-High. This version of the STAMP test does not contain any items at the Advanced level, so level 6 is the highest score possible.

The tables below show the percentage of students at each benchmark level by current grade level. Separate tables are shown for each language skill. The number of students tested in each grade is given, followed by the percentage at each benchmark level. Note that the highest level for the reading component is 5, while speaking and writing samples may be rated as high as level 6.

Table 2. Reading – Percentage of Immersion Students at Each Proficiency Level by Grade

| Grade | Count | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5+ |
|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| 6 | 157 | 15.9 | 38.2 | 29.3 | 12.7 | 3.8 |
| 7 | 232 | 10.3 | 23.7 | 32.3 | 24.6 | 9.1 |
| 8 | 671 | 14.6 | 18.3 | 28.8 | 23.5 | 14.8 |
| 9 | 147 | 2.0 | 19.7 | 34.0 | 20.4 | 23.8 |
| 10 | 132 | 4.5 | 12.9 | 32.6 | 27.3 | 22.7 |
| 11 | 51 | 2.0 | 9.8 | 27.5 | 31.4 | 29.4 |
| 12 | 35 | 0.0 | 2.9 | 5.7 | 28.6 | 62.9 |

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Table 3. Writing – Percentage of Immersion Students at Each Proficiency Level by Grade

| Grade | Count | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 | Level 6+ |
|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| 6 | 154 | 1.3 | 5.2 | 37.0 | 54.5 | 1.3 | 0.6 |
| 7 | 231 | 0.0 | 1.7 | 22.1 | 44.6 | 25.5 | 6.1 |
| 8 | 644 | 0.5 | 2.5 | 30.3 | 42.7 | 19.4 | 4.7 |
| 9 | 151 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 21.9 | 41.1 | 22.5 | 11.9 |
| 10 | 131 | 1.5 | 2.3 | 16.0 | 42.0 | 24.4 | 13.7 |
| 11 | 52 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 9.6 | 46.2 | 28.8 | 15.4 |
| 12 | 34 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 0.0 | 44.1 | 35.3 | 14.7 |

Table 4. Speaking – Percentage of Immersion Students at Each Proficiency Level by Grade

| Grade | Count | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 | Level 5 | Level 6+ |
|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| 6 | 141 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 51.8 | 41.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 7 | 221 | 0.0 | 4.1 | 26.7 | 47.5 | 19.9 | 1.8 |
| 8 | 631 | 1.1 | 4.8 | 35.3 | 43.3 | 13.3 | 2.2 |
| 9 | 137 | 0.0 | 1.5 | 27.0 | 44.5 | 16.1 | 10.9 |
| 10 | 117 | 0.0 | 4.3 | 16.2 | 54.7 | 23.1 | 1.7 |
| 11 | 47 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 12.8 | 57.4 | 27.7 | 2.1 |
| 12 | 32 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.1 | 46.9 | 46.9 | 3.1 |